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SHIFTA AND ANTI-SHIFTA ACTIVITY IN ERITREA,
DECEMBER 1952 - JANUARY 1953

SHIFTAS BOLD; TOWN ROBBERIES INCREASE -- Asmara, Il Lunedi del Medio Oriente,
1 Dec 52

The Shiftas are back in vogue. They seem to have adopted better manners in dealing with their victims, but they continue to be as thorough as ever in their searches for loot. Their boldness, too, has increased: they no longer hesitate to operate in the same locale twice in succession.

It is believed that poverty and hunger account for the numerous thefts that are taking place in the heart of Asmara and other cities. These thefts take various guises. As you walk along, some Eritrean follows silently and closely behind. He whispers in no uncertain terms that he knows you, and that he cannot wait any longer for the work you promised him. You give him something. But his threatening air indicates that one dollar is not enough. Then, there are the thieves who make up a story about having sold you something for which they want to be paid. Finally, some of them wait on dark, lonely streets, obstruct your way, and demand a large sum, claiming to know you or some close relative of yours.

BANDIT LEADER SURRENDERS; POLICE AMBUSH SHIFTA BAND -- Asmara, Il Quotidiano Eritreo, 14 Dec 52

On the evening of 12 December, Afworke Seleba, a bandit leader in Serae District, surrendered to the police. He had with him an Italian carbine and some ammunition. He had been operating in the area south of Arresa for several months.

Another Shifta incident occurred on 13 December. Eritrean police received information that a band of Shiftas were headed toward the Hazamo Plain. Police patrols set up an ambush on the Afalba highway, about 3 kilometers from Decamere.

- 1 -

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At 1930 hours, the bandits arrived, and there followed a short but violent encounter, during which one of them, a member of the Assaorta tribe, was captured. The others escaped, but some may have been wounded. None of the police was wounded.

It was ascertained that this band is the same one, consisting of seven members (plus one just added), which committed the attack on the Massaua road [on 10 December] [redacted]. The captured bandit's rifle and shirt were identified as part of the equipment stolen when the band raided the police station in Archico.

Colonel Cracknell, the Police Commissioner, arrived to direct further operations to apprehend the fugitive bandits, dead or alive. A 50-man dragnet was set up for this purpose.

SEIZE SECOND MEMBER OF SHIFTA BAND -- Asmara, Il Quotidiano Eritreo, 19 Dec 52

On 18 December, in the Adi Caiieh market, two policemen identified and arrested another member of the band responsible for the Massaua road robbery and the Archico police station raid. The man seized was Abdailah Suatu, a native of Minniferi and formerly a baker in Edaga Arbi, Massaua area. He was unarmed when arrested.

On the same day, police also found another of the carbines that were stolen from the Archico police station.

SHIFTAS ROB BUS, CAR PASSENGERS -- Asmara, Giornale dell' Eritrea, 31 Dec 52

On 30 December, the Massaua-Asmara bus was stopped by five Shifta bandits 10 kilometers from Massaua. They did so by firing at the bus tires. The driver was told he would have been shot if he had not stopped at the first command. The bandits separated the men and women, and robbed only the men of their watches and money (the wallets and remaining contents thereof were politely returned). The women were not molested. Afterward, the Shiftas invited one of the passengers to photograph them with his camera. They also gave the bus driver a note of unrevealed contents to take to the Massaua police.

Another vehicle was stopped and its occupants robbed when it arrived on the scene. It contained three persons, two of them professors. After being relieved of their money, they were courteously asked to depart.

2 OUTLAWS HOLD UP A CAR, ARE FOILED AT SECOND ROBBERY -- Asmara, Giornale dell' Eritrea, 4 Jan 53

At 1730 hours on 1 January 1953, two outlaws, one armed with a Model 91 rifle [Italian] and the other with a dagger, held up a truck on the Cheren-Asmara road, 48 kilometers from Asmara. Its occupants, an Italian and an Eritrean, were robbed of 149 Ethiopian dollars and their clothing.

The outlaws stopped another car at the same spot but had to flee without any loot when a bus, in which a police constable was traveling as a passenger, drove up. A police official said later that the outlaws were wearing civilian clothes.

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BANDITS ROB 3 TRUCKS COMING FROM ETHIOPIA -- Asmara, Giornale dell' Eritrea,
17 Jan 53

On 12 January 1953, six bandits, four of them armed with Model 91 rifles and one with a British carbine, barred the road 23 kilometers from Senafe and held up three trucks coming from Ethiopia. The trucks, driven by an Italian and two Eritreans, were loaded with coffee and various other goods. The bandits collected, in money, clothing, and personal objects, a total of about 400 Ethiopian dollars. One of the bandits also ripped open a sack of coffee and took about 20 kilograms of it.

The travelers were not mistreated, although they were detained for over 2 hours. They reported later that there were five or six Eritrean boys accompanying the bandits. Police patrols are now combing the area.

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- 3 -

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